

## CHAPTER 4: CURRENT USE, POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

### Introduction

With the history and physical context of the park in mind, it is important to consider the most critical element of any park: people. Skinner Butte Park serves a function in our community. It is affected by, and created by, those who use it and those who manage it. To determine the best possible future for the park, therefore, it is important to understand how these influences are working today. This chapter will discuss the elements of human influence on the park, from park users to daily park management to the policy that governs both. It will also examine some current park trends, and how they may affect the planning direction for Skinner Butte Park.

### Role and Function

#### ***Unique Resource***

Through various shifts in culture and perception, Skinner Butte Park has remained a vital hub for the city's park system for nearly a century. For many reasons, as discussed elsewhere, the park has and is still a focus for the local community as a whole; a place of common ground and common heritage. This is a fundamental part of defining what is now considered a "metropolitan park." The other key piece of this definition hinges upon the presence of resources that are unique within the system. A diversity of unique values, such as the butte, the river,

cultural resources, heritage and social meaning, location, size and historic function, combine within Skinner Butte Park to play a complex role in the community.

#### ***Birthplace of the Community***

In a sense, Skinner Butte Park is the cradle of Eugene. Other cities may lay claim to a single house, a remnant farmstead, or simply a note in the history books about the origins of their contemporary community. Eugene is fortunate enough to have preserved, in perpetuity, a parcel of land over 100 acres in size that includes part of the very first Euro-American settlement in the area. As the city grew up around the park (see Chapter 2, Euro-American Settlement), a unique accretion of cultural remnants has evolved within the park that amounts to a living time table.

Unfortunately, much of this history is currently available to only a few knowledgeable community members. This indicates a certain unfulfilled potential for the park to serve a role as an anchor to the community's own past. Although the only accessible interpretation of history is currently experienced through the Skinner's cabin replica and the Applegate Trail Interpretive Center, there is a strong indication of an awareness of an underlying historical potential within the park. Public input clearly shows that this potential is highly valued within the park.

## **Natural Resource Education**

Many historic precedents point to the role of Skinner Butte Park as a passive recreation resource (see Chapter 2, “A Brief History of Skinner Butte Park”). Previous planning and policy for the park, as evidenced by the 1969 Metropolitan Civic Club survey and master planning effort, supports this idea and underscores the tremendous value of the park’s natural resources around the butte and the river. In recognition of this value, the theme of passive recreation has increased in popularity over the years as the community’s recreational preferences have begun to edge towards a more balanced, resource-based approach. Community input for the development of this master plan clearly shows a continuation of this trend.

Although Skinner Butte Park’s prominence and location demand a certain level of tolerance to human impact in natural areas, it is not adequately directed or minimized by the current condition of access routes and trails (see Chapter 3, “Current Condition”). It is important to recognize that the park’s natural resources have tremendous potential to play a central role in education of the community. Supporting this role in the park, however, while protecting the existing resources will require a thoughtful and creative approach.

## **Social Center**

The park has historically served first and foremost as a community focus for individuals, families and groups throughout the metropolitan area for social recreation, perspective, relaxation and enjoyment of the natural environment of the butte and river. As noted in the Hendricks Park Forest Management Plan, the National Recreation and Park Association puts forth recommendations for park classifications that expand upon those currently used by the City of Eugene. Specifically, a classification for natural resource areas, preserves and open space is deemed more appropriate for areas with high natural resource values. A metropolitan park is defined in broader terms as offering a “wide variety” of park and recreation functions serving the entire metropolitan area.

Skinner Butte Park, although it contains significant natural resources, is appropriately classified as a metropolitan park for its diversity of unique values, including social values and history, that would be too restricted by a purely natural resource classification. Furthermore, since Hendricks Park, a once popular destination for large groups and events, has officially adopted a policy of reduced visitor impact to protect its natural resources, the need for suitable sites for these activities is displaced to other areas in the park system, or to private developments offering a similar function.

Skinner Butte Park provides a number of areas, including the “park core” area around the existing playground, the Campbell Senior Center, the currently undeveloped west end, and the summit of Skinner Butte, that are highly suitable to large group social functions. The improvement of these areas to accommodate the expected increase in need and capacity will be important to both adequately and comfortably support this function, but also to focus the activity in those areas and away from more sensitive natural resources. It is important for the identity and social framework of the community that this role as a social center be preserved and actively supported within the park.

***It is important for the identity and social framework of the community to support Skinner Butte Park as a social center***

*The summit overlook area is an important focal point for the community*



*Visitors relax in the park core area. Survey respondents listed relaxation as the top reason for visiting Skinner Butte Park.*



### Use Patterns

Skinner Butte Park, through a diversity of activities that it has to offer, is used in equally diverse ways. The citywide survey helped catalog the types and popularity of certain general uses. The results suggest an approach for the future that builds on this diversity, with an emphasis on preservation and enhancement of those uses that are most popular and/or compatible with other unique, park-specific uses.

According to the citywide survey, people currently visit Skinner Butte Park mainly for relaxation, exercise (individual exercise such as biking, running, hiking, etc.), to enjoy nature, and for biking (primarily through the use of the bike path). Other popular uses include visiting the summit of Skinner Butte for views of the surrounding area, picnicking, using the playground, and social events. This reflects a continuation of passive recreation, social functions and low-level active recreation (such as individual sports and playgrounds) as the primary focus for the park, as supported by previous planning efforts and management policy.

**Passive recreation, social functions and individual active recreation are the primary focus for the park**

Some other, complementary uses include river recreation, experiencing history, rock climbing and the occasional use of the existing softball field. Although some hikers and dog-walkers use the lower river terrace and informal riverbank foot pathriver, access within the park is poor and naturally limits the extent to which river-related activities may currently be pursued. Likewise, the interpretation of the park's historic, cultural resources (see Chapter 3, "Cultural Resources") is currently limited. Both of these uses are complementary to the primary uses of the park, and are good candidates for greater support and expansion.

### Conflicting Uses

#### Negative Use:

The most conflicting uses present in the park include negative use patterns such as vandalism, illegal camping, littering, drug use and drinking. Many park facilities and natural areas are currently impacted by these activities. In particular, illegal camping and drug use has created unsafe and unsanitary conditions in certain areas around the butte and along the river. As a result of these activities, legitimate users are wary of entering these areas or avoid them altogether. Some legitimate users reportedly also avoid the Skinner Butte summit parking area during nighttime hours when loud music and underage drinking may be notably more frequent. Overall, studies show that the re-introduction and support of positive, legitimate use is the most effective remedy to the problem of negative use. Providing clean, attractive and safe facilities, programming, and a legitimate adult presence such as vending carts, along with actively discouraging negative use may offer an effective long-term solution.

#### Mountain Biking:

Mountain bikers and hikers are occasionally in conflict when using trails on the butte and along the river bank. Although both user groups impact natural areas and vegetation through trail cut-offs, erosion and compaction, the small size and



fragility of the park's habitats are less likely to sustain long-term use by mountain biking than other areas in the park system, such as the Ridgeline Trail. Because of this, and in recognition of the potential for high pedestrian use from downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods, mountain biking may be an inappropriate use for the park. Streets and bike paths provide adequate bike access to the park, and the short lengths of trails within the park are not likely to create a significant draw for legitimate mountain biking interest.

### Organized Sports:

The citywide survey indicates organized sports as the least popular use for the park, as well as the lowest priority for additions to park facilities (2% to 7% support). Other public input also clearly indicates that organized sports are a low priority. The most frequent explanation for this opinion is that organized sports facilities such as soccer fields and softball fields are seen as a use suitable to any relatively level, open site, and do not reflect or support the unique qualities of Skinner Butte Park. Opinions suggest, however, that the existing ball field (see Chapter 3), as a historic, sub-standard facility, provides an opportunity for informal play associated with social events taking place near the main picnic area. The ball field is currently not programmed or reserved (due to its small size), and should remain open for informal play only. Support exists for smaller court-type sports facilities under the condition that they are strictly ancillary to social event functions, and do not conflict with unique park values.

### Changing Society, Changing Use Patterns

Often despite the condition of the facilities, the park is popular and enjoys a great deal of use on summer evenings and weekends. In the morning and in the evening, bicycle commuters and runners use the bike path. At lunchtime, more noon-hour users are attracted to the park for exercise, or to enjoy lunch or take a nap in their car. As in many city parks, however, there appears to be relatively little activity during other daytime hours.



*Mountain bikers, hikers and dog-walkers use the existing, unimproved river bank foot path*

Changing cultural values, including productivity, demands of education, gender roles, work schedules and modes of popular entertainment all probably contribute to this trend in one way or another. The reactivation of the park through programming that is responsive to these contemporary trends is seen as key to shifting back towards more positive use patterns. In addition, offering opportunities, facilities and management in city parks that respond to contemporary leisure preferences such as nature, education, personal sporting activities and events may help attract more park users back from other forms of local entertainment and more distant outdoor recreation destinations.

Focusing on enhancing features attractive to the public, while restoring and protecting natural resources may be the key to long-term transformation towards positive use patterns. With its large size and geographic diversity, Skinner Butte Park offers tremendous potential in this area.

**Skinner Butte Park has the potential to offer many features that are attractive to today's park users**

## Management

### Staffing and Funding

Skinner Butte Park is maintained on a regular schedule, and on an as-needed basis by general parks maintenance staff. There are no staff currently dedicated specifically to the maintenance of the park. Mowing, weeding, pruning, trash removal and facilities repair occur regularly, while

***There are no permanent or renewable funding sources committed to maintenance of Skinner Butte Park***

renovation of planting beds, such as work done recently near the Facility Management buildings and main picnic area, generally occurs as maintenance staff and funding are available. Over the past few years, volunteer efforts through organizations such as the Eugene Rotary Club, have helped stretch currently limited staff and funding to help maintain and improve the quality of park facilities. With no dedicated staff for the park, organizational responsibilities have generally been shared for these projects.

By financial necessity, the large natural areas within the park are not maintained by regular staff. Removal of invasive species has increased in recent years, such as ivy removal in the north side forest, as well as blackberry and Scotch broom removal, and thinning of vegetation in other areas. This work has typically occurred through staff-managed volunteer efforts or contracted labor with youth organizations or county corrections crews. Ongoing experimentation has been exploring the most effective methods for invasive species removal in conjunction with local naturalists and students from the University of Oregon.

Recent efforts have increased around removal of debris from illegal camps and drug use. Funding was recently allocated for a river-bank clean-up effort that has

helped spur activity in this area. In the winter and spring of 2001, a large area of invasive plant species was removed through a separate project from the south Skinner Butte area, west of the SMJ House and north of the Lincoln Yard. Dozens of illegal camps, including tons of litter and waste and hundreds of hypodermic needles, were also removed. SMJ house staff report that legitimate use has increased significantly in this area since the project was completed.

There are no permanent or renewable funding sources committed to the maintenance of Skinner Butte Park. In the face of imminent budget cuts and increasing demand on maintenance staff, this has been a significant challenge. Given the importance of this resource, the need for long-term funding is urgent.

### **Events and Activities**

Several major annual events occur in Skinner Butte Park, including the Butte-to-Butte run in early summer, bicycle races and a breakfast social during the Eugene Celebration. These events are allowed by permit, and contribute greatly to positive use patterns. For its location and generally good access and parking, Skinner Butte Park is an ideal location for community-wide events. These and other types of events should be encouraged and supported through facility improvement and policy.

Several facilities in and around Skinner Butte Park are available for renting. Lamb Cottage, the Campbell Senior Center and the Shelton-McMurphey-Johnson House are all rented and frequently booked for private events. Records show that other park facilities around the city are also rented to capacity, particularly during the warm season, and indicate a need for more of this type of facility. Large and small outdoor rental shelters are among the most popular facilities for private events. If public facilities fail to accommodate this need, there may be a greater likelihood that the private sector will move to fill the demand, possibly forfeiting the benefits of community-building and positive use patterns in city parks.

***The need for long-term funding is urgent***



Urban Forestry staff on call in Skinner Butte Park

# Current Policy and Trends



## Statewide Planning Goals

Statewide Goal 5 supports the conservation of open space and the protection of natural and scenic resources. This goal also

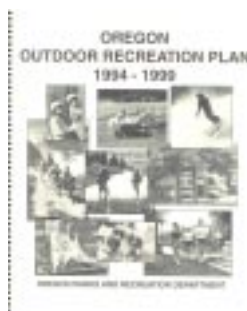
highlights the importance of managing existing resources, including cultural areas, historic areas, natural areas, open space, scenic areas and wilderness so as to preserve their original character.

Statewide Planning Goal 8 mandates and sets forth criteria for assessing, planning and developing recreational facilities. Guidelines are also provided for implementation of recreation plans, including funding sources, review criteria and basic priorities. The 1989 Eugene Parks and Recreation Plan was created through the recommendations of Goal 8.

Statewide Planning Goal 15 mandates the Willamette River Greenway, including preservation and public acquisition of land along the Willamette River for public access, recreation, scenic quality and wildlife habitat. Skinner Butte Park is within the defined boundary of the Greenway, and is subject to the special permitting requirements established by Goal 15. Triggers requiring a Greenway permit application include any development, change of use or intensification of use on properties within the Greenway. The permit process requires extensive documentation of project parameters, public review and a public hearing.

## Relevant Goals and Policies of the 1989 Eugene Parks and Recreation Plan

- ▶ Strengthen the role of recreational and cultural services in order to improve the community's marketability and economic base.
- ▶ Maintain, remodel and upgrade park, recreational and cultural facilities in order to respond to changing uses as well as attain and preserve operational efficiency.
- ▶ Prepare general plans for major park land and facilities prior to development or renovation in order to promote project coordination and to conserve and protect natural open spaces where appropriate.
- ▶ Provide natural areas, cultural amenities, and unique open spaces for educational and passive leisure use.
- ▶ Protect unique geographical features, buttes, and other natural landmarks in parks and other recreational facilities for their contribution to the community's identity.
- ▶ In coordination with the Historic Review Board, identify and acknowledge historic sites, buildings, structures and objects and preserve their integrity in park and recreational facilities.
- ▶ Treat environmental enhancement as a component of recreational development.
- ▶ Protect views from natural promontories that are not yet developed if they are in public ownership.
- ▶ Promote the development of bicycle and pedestrian routes between all neighborhoods and major recreational and cultural resources such as the Willamette River, the south hills and the downtown area.
- ▶ Encourage bus and bicycle use for traveling to parks by providing shelters, drop-off areas, and bicycle paths.
- ▶ Provide safe parking at parks and recreational facilities that commonly draw crowds arriving by both automobile and bicycles.
- ▶ Provide safe and convenient access to parks and recreational facilities for persons with disabilities.



## Statewide Recreation Planning

The 1994-1999 Oregon Outdoor Recreation Plan, prepared by the Oregon Department of Parks and

Recreation, included an extensive survey of recreation preferences and participation throughout Oregon. The results reveal significant trends towards passive recreational activities such as walking, running, picnicking, trail use and nature observation. This study closely reflects local trends revealed through the citywide survey for preferred uses of Skinner Butte

**A statewide survey revealed trends towards passive recreation activities**

**Planning goals to bring more high density residential development downtown highlight the importance of Skinner Butte Park as an open space resource**

Park. The study also reflected a desire for more activities in these areas, also including cultural events and botanical and historical displays.

The survey also explored barriers to participation in local recreation activities. Over 60% of respondents cited having “no time” to participate in their favorite activities, followed by the response that conditions are “too crowded”, or “too far” to participate. These trends generally support the need for development of passive recreational facilities on a level that can adequately serve the local population without overcrowding or excessive competition for the resource, as well as creative and attractive programming adapted to modern lifestyles and able to compete with increasing time demands.



### **Eugene Parks and Recreation Plan**

The 1989 Eugene Parks and Recreation Plan highlights several recommendations affecting Skinner Butte Park (see box inset on facing page). Skinner Butte Park is the most significant park resource in the Central Planning District, which is characterized by the highest housing density (and lowest household size), the

lowest home ownership rate, and the highest percentage of total development (95%) of all 11 districts within the city. This underscores the park's importance as a social center and open space resource for the downtown area.

High-priority actions in the 1989 plan include the construction of sand volleyball courts, the completion of land acquisition north of Cheshire Avenue, and the extension of Cheshire Avenue through the existing I-105 underpass to connect with Jefferson Street and the Owen Rose Garden. This recommendation still makes sense in terms of a functional connection between Skinner Butte Park and Owen Rose Garden, but has met with resistance during neighborhood planning efforts. Public response towards volleyball courts has been generally ambivalent.

Medium priority actions include working with the Historic Review Board to evaluate various ways to preserve historic sites in the Skinner Butte area and to increase public awareness of their role in Eugene's early development. This recommendation is clearly reflected in current public sentiment.

### **Metropolitan Natural Resources Study**

State Planning Goal 5 mandates the inventory of natural resources by local jurisdictions. A joint team including the City of Eugene, the City of Springfield and Lane County is currently in the process of completing a study for the Eugene/Springfield metro area. Although specific recommendations are not due to be published until 2003, preliminary maps identify Skinner Butte as significant upland habitat, and the banks of the Willamette River through Skinner Butte Park as a significant riparian corridor. These areas are likely to be identified for preservation and restoration of existing habitat values.

### **Downtown Visioning**

As highlighted through an extensive public involvement and visioning process in 2000/2001, urban planning goals for Eugene include bringing more residents and higher

*The Downtown Visioning process and North End Scoping Group identified opportunities to connect downtown to Skinner Butte Park near the historic train station, shown here c. 1912*





development densities into the downtown area. As part of an overall program to reduce urban sprawl, transportation demands and the decentralization of the community, this is important for the long-term health and vitality of the city's urban core. Other policy and infrastructure improvement measures are being taken to effect these changes.

As the largest urban park directly adjacent to the downtown core of Eugene, Skinner Butte Park will be a key resource for revitalization of this area. Urban residents will need readily accessible open spaces as a counter-balance to urban living. Development and maintenance of recreational and natural resources to serve this increasing urban population, as well as convenient pedestrian and bicycle access from the downtown area, will be important for the success of these planning goals. Specific visions for the downtown area include a pedestrian extension of Willamette Street near the train station to the Shelton-McMurphy-Johnson House and the summit of Skinner Butte.



### **North End Scoping Group**

In 1999, a city staff-facilitated committee initiated by the mayor and Eugene City Council met to discuss the future

of the north end of downtown Eugene, including 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, between High and Charnelton, and the train station area. The plan highlights several recommendations affecting future planning and policy for Skinner Butte Park (see inset box to right).

### **Relevant Recommendations from the North End Scoping Group**

- ▶ Creating a pedestrian connection to the Shelton-McMurphy-Johnson House and up the south side of Skinner Butte
- ▶ Promoting pedestrian use and implementing traffic calming measures
- ▶ Keeping and restoring the train station, and promoting it as a civic destination
- ▶ Providing safe pedestrian access to the train station from areas north of the tracks
- ▶ Creating new public spaces
- ▶ Promoting street vendors and other activation of public space
- ▶ Promoting increased density, mixed use and residential development of the north end area
- ▶ Developing design standards to reflect the unique historic character of the area
- ▶ Providing shuttle bus services, on-street parking and parking structures
- ▶ Providing more bicycle parking



### **Whiteaker Neighborhood Refinement Plan**

The Whiteaker neighborhood refinement plan, developed in 1994, proposes several recommendations relevant to Skinner

Butte Park. These recommendations are listed in the table on the facing page.



### **Planning for Skinner Butte Park**

Very little planning has taken place specifically to guide the development of Skinner Butte Park. The most recent effort involved the Metropolitan Civic

Club, formed in 1969 to look at Skinner Butte and generate ideas for possible uses (see Chapter 2). Many separate planning efforts have also been undertaken for other areas of Skinner Butte Park, including development of picnic areas, the summit

***There has never been a comprehensive planning effort for Skinner Butte Park***



### Relevant Recommendations from the Whiteaker Neighborhood Refinement Plan

- ▶ Expand Skinner Butte Park in order to facilitate use and enjoyment of the Shelton-McMurphey-Johnson House and to protect the lower slopes from further erosion by retaining significant vegetation
- ▶ Continue to pursue acquisition of the vacant wooded portion of the Ya-Po-Ah Terrace property, south of the Shelton-McMurphey-Johnson House for public open space and retention of as much of the wooded area as possible
- ▶ Examine City acquisition of the vacant parcels on the northeastern edge of Skinner Butte Park for public open space and retention of the urban forest
- ▶ Recognize the Skinner Butte Mixed Use Area as appropriate for a mixture of land uses including light-medium industrial, commercial and residential
- ▶ Continue to encourage the development of community garden space on suitable publicly owned land in the Whiteaker community
- ▶ In evaluating future new park-related uses or activities at the City maintenance yard at 255 Lincoln Street, consideration should be given to the impacts proposed uses may have on Skinner Butte, particularly with regard to the southwesterly view of the City from the road immediately above the property. Consider replacing the existing parking lot for basalt column users to a new site on the northern portion of the maintenance site.
- ▶ Improve landscape in the open space portion of the park area north of Cheshire Street and east of the I-105 bridge
- ▶ Prior to establishing a budget for the project or expending any additional City capital funds, conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the impacts associated with the potential extension of Cheshire Street from Washington Street to Jefferson Street under the I-105 bridge
- ▶ Identify portions of the Willamette Riverbank to preserve in as natural a state as possible. This would include encouraging the use of native plant species that help to support wildlife and NOT planting green lawns
- ▶ Strengthen policy aimed at protecting natural vegetation and wildlife habitats [in parks] by including support for diversity of wildlife species and populations. Shift planting of public parks away from heavily managed ground to natural self-propagating plants to obtain low-maintenance costs while considering safety.

*Skinner Butte Park has long been surrounded by a mix of industrial, commercial and residential uses (as shown in this 1934 photograph). The Whiteaker Neighborhood Refinement plan suggests continuing this mix of uses in the Skinner Butte area.*



overlook area, parking areas, riverbank stabilization, street improvements, building renovations, etc. None of these efforts appear to have been guided by a publicly adopted master plan. Several student projects through the University of Oregon Landscape Architecture program represent the first attempts to address the park holistically. These plans, however, were developed with minimal public involvement and were also never officially recognized or adopted.

### Shelton-McMurphey-Johnson House Historic Landscape Master Plan

This recent body of grant-funded research outlines suggestions for the Shelton-McMurphey-Johnson House and surrounding areas. Although this is not an officially adopted plan, some aspects are currently under consideration.

### Summary

Although no publicly-adopted master plan has previously existed for Skinner Butte Park, current planning policy clearly points to the importance of this resource for passive recreation, preservation of cultural resources, as well as the livability and economic success of downtown Eugene. Overall, related planning efforts also support the theme of respecting the unique aspects of the park, and combining them sensitively for a diversity of recreational experiences, education, and intrinsic natural and cultural resource values.